

Ref.: ASA 37/2007.004
ASA 37/005/2007

Mahinda Samarasinghe
Minister of Disaster Management and Human Rights
383, Department of Meteorology
Bauddhaloka Mawatha
Colombo 7
Sri Lanka

8 March 2007

Dear Minister,

**Open letter from Amnesty International to the Minister of Disaster Management
and Human Rights on the occasion of the fourth session of the
UN Human Rights Council**

Amnesty International welcomes the commitment of the Government of Sri Lanka to continue to brief the UN Human Rights Council in a comprehensive manner.¹ We encourage you to include the following issues in an overview of the human rights situation when you address the Council at its fourth session on 12 March 2007.

According to Amnesty International's information, the human rights situation in Sri Lanka continues to deteriorate seriously. It is important for the international community to learn what the Government of Sri Lanka is doing and will do to stem further deterioration of the situation, bring about improvements, and end impunity for past human rights violations. As you are aware, many civilians are caught up in the fighting between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and urgently require effective protection. More than 220,000 civilians have been displaced by the violence. Amnesty International is concerned that the parties to the conflict are not doing all they can to protect the civilian population. Humanitarian access to civilians has been severely curtailed and humanitarian personnel have been attacked and killed. The Jaffna Peninsula remains isolated with a lack of food, dwindling medical supplies and severe restrictions on travel. Reports of political killings and enforced disappearances by the government and armed groups are re-emerging and increasing. A climate of impunity persists.

A mechanism is urgently required to address the current lack of protection for civilians. There is a need for effective and sustained international monitoring and investigation of human rights abuses. Given the deteriorating situation it is critical that the Human Rights Council is briefed on what action the Government of Sri Lanka is taking in response to the High Commissioner for Human Rights' recommendation that 'a broader international mechanism is still needed to monitor, ultimately prevent, human rights violations in the longer term.'²

¹ Statement by Delegation of Sri Lanka following update by High Commissioner of Human Rights at the HRC on 29 November 2006.

² UN Press Release, High Commissioner for Human Rights Hopes New Inquiry Commission on Killings and Disappearances in Sri Lanka Will Prove Effective, 6 November 2006
(www.unhchr.ch/hurricane/hurricane.nsf/view01/67DAEA0611B7C3D0C125721E005F3EA4?opendocument)

Of particular concern are the increasingly numerous reports of enforced disappearances and unlawful killings in Sri Lanka, including over 1,000 reported extrajudicial executions and unlawful killings in 2006³ and hundreds of disappearances across the country. The Government must ensure sustained investigations into *all* alleged unlawful killings and enforced disappearances, with a view to identification of suspects and prosecution in proceedings that fully respect international fair trial standards. This was a need also identified by the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions following this visit to Sri Lanka in 2005.⁴ Without such measures, the killings and disappearances will continue unabated and many cases will continue to be left unresolved. It will be important for the government to update the Council on steps taken to act on the recommendations made by the Special Rapporteur.

Amnesty International is also concerned about reports of the increasingly arbitrary nature of detentions taking place in Sri Lanka. The organization has received numerous reports of cases where no receipts or records of detention are being made available to family members of those who have been arrested, despite the Presidential warrant of July 2006 requiring such notifications. Compounding this a lack of clarity about where significant numbers of detainees are being held exposes them to increased risks of torture or ill-treatment as well as becoming victims of enforced disappearance. Amnesty International strongly encourages you to provide information to the Council about measures by the Sri Lankan government to ensure that the detention procedures fully adhere to national and international legal standards. In light of the escalation of these reports Amnesty International suggests that the Government of Sri Lanka should consider inviting the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and the Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances to visit Sri Lanka.

Amnesty International would also urge you to consider updating the Human Rights Council on how the Victim and Witness Protection Unit of the Commission of Inquiry and the International Independent Group of Eminent Persons, announced by Commission Chairman Justice N. K. Udalgama in January 2007,⁵ will ensure the safety of not only victims and witnesses but also those conducting the investigations and others involved with the Commission in any way. Amnesty International is concerned that this Unit is not fully functional despite the fact that the Commission has already publicly called for representations from the public.

Amnesty International looks forward to your clarification of the issues highlighted in this letter when you address the Human Rights Council on 12 March.

Yours sincerely,

Timothy Parritt
Acting Director
Asia-Pacific Regional Programme

³ Home for Human Rights; open letter to Philip Alston 8 September 2006

⁴ Report of the Special Rapporteur, Philip Alston; Mission to Sri Lanka (28 November to 6 December 2005) E/CN.4/2006/53/Add.5 27 March 2006.

⁵ Daily Mirror, 10 January (<http://www.dailymirror.lk/2007/01/10/news/1.asp>).